

# Electoral Statistics for Scotland

as at 1 December 2021

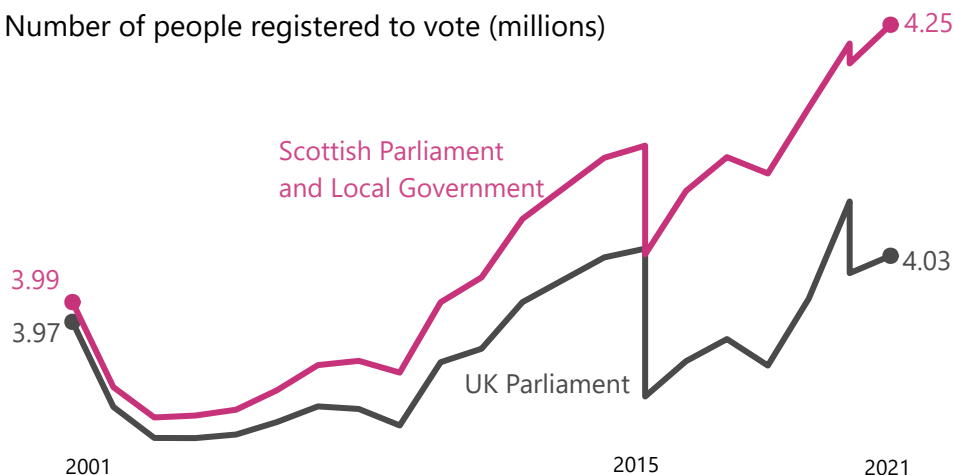


Published on 5 April 2022

## Electorates in Scotland have increased in 2021

Compared to 2020 the electorate for UK Parliamentary elections increased by 0.4% and the electorate for Scottish Parliament and local government elections by 0.9%.

Number of people registered to vote (millions)

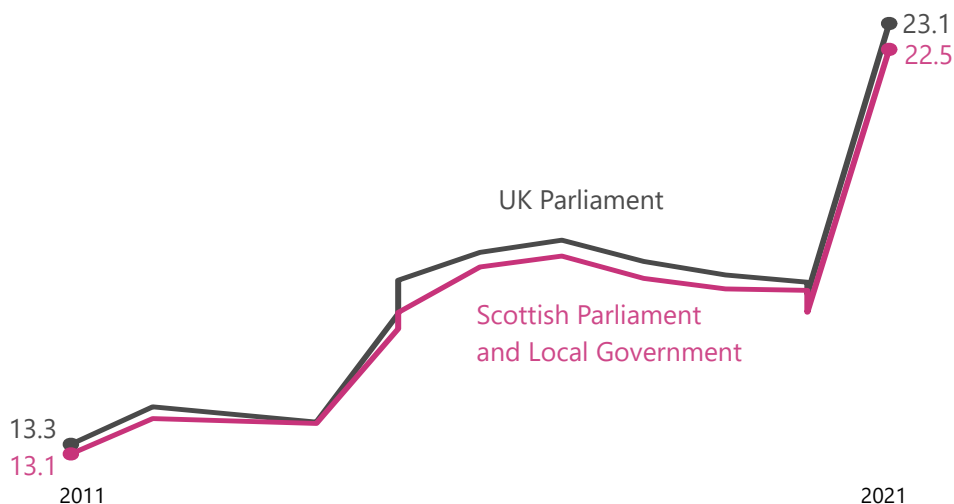


The introduction of individual electoral registration (IER) from Sept 2014 resulted in a downward discontinuity in the data. IER affected the registration of students in particular; previously block registration was permitted particularly for students in halls of residence. The voting age for Scottish Parliament and local government elections was lowered to 16 in June 2015.

## A quarter of the electorate is registered for a postal vote

The proportion of the electorate registered for a postal vote has increased greatly since December 2020. It is nearly twice the level a decade ago which was around 13% for both UK Parliamentary elections, and Scottish Parliament and local government elections.

The proportion of the Scottish electorate registered for postal voting (%)

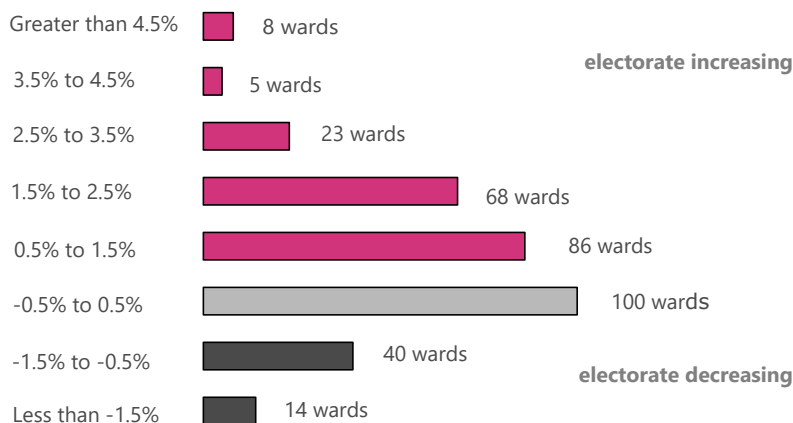


Opting to register for a postal vote in the 2021 Scottish Parliament election and the 5 May 2022 Scottish local elections may have become more popular in response to Covid-19.

## Most electoral wards see an increase compared to their electorate in 2020

Between December 2020 and December 2021, the electorate increased in around 70% (240) of the 344 comparable electoral wards in Scotland (excludes North Ayrshire wards due to ward changes).

Change in electorate over previous year

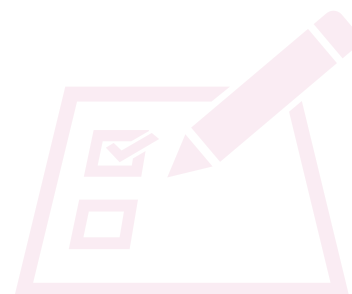


Note: these numbers exclude North Ayrshire due to ward changes not being comparable with last years ward name and area code

## Summary of main points

### At 1 December 2021:

- The number of registered voters in Scotland for **UK Parliamentary elections** was **4,028,700**. This is an increase of 16,300 (0.4%) on the previous year.
- The number of registered voters for **Scottish Parliament and local government elections** was **4,245,200**. This is an increase of 36,300 (0.9%) on the previous year.
- There were **77,600 young people aged 16 or 17** registered to vote at Scottish Parliament and local government elections, 1.8% of the total electorate. This is an increase of 4,300 (5.9%) on the previous year.
- Nearly a million people were registered for **postal voting** in UK Parliamentary elections (930,200, 23.1% of the total electorate) and also in the Scottish Parliament and local government elections (954,500, 22.5% of the total electorate). These numbers each represented increases of 38% on the previous year - most likely driven by the Covid pandemic.
- There were **172,100 foreign nationals** registered to vote in Scottish Parliament and local government elections. This represented 4.1% of the total electorate.



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Definitions and other contextual information for the statistics presented in this publication are available in a separate [background note](#).

## 1. Overview

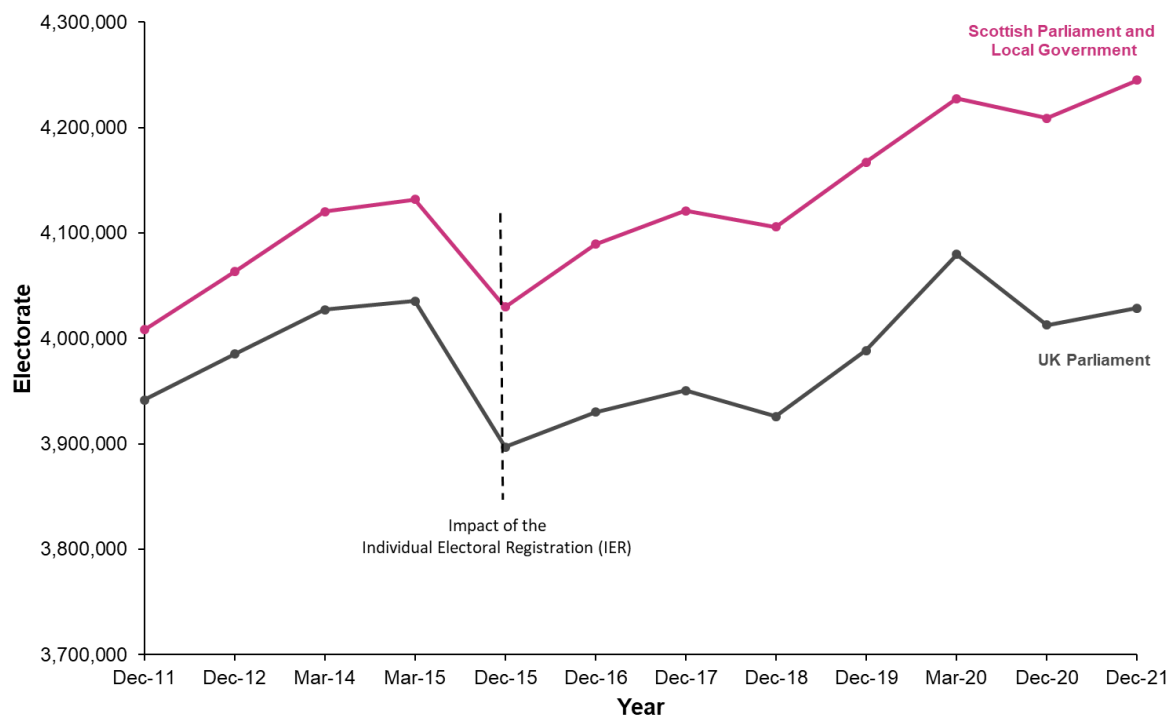
### Why does the electorate change in size?

There are three main reasons:

- **The population changes.** People move to or from an area. The number of people old enough to vote changes. People die in smaller or greater numbers. [Figure 1](#) shows a generally upward trend between 2011 and 2021 in the number of people registered to vote in elections in Scotland. This is consistent with the increase in the population aged 18 and over, which rose by around 5% over this period.
- **More people get interested in politics.** This could be because of a significant vote, a specific political campaign or a current social issue.
- **The rules on who can vote change.** For example, in 2015 Scotland lowered the minimum voting age to 16 for Scottish Parliament and local government elections.

[Figure 2](#) and [Figure 3](#) illustrate trends in the number of registered voters in the context of key election events in the last ten years. An increase in registered voters is often seen in the lead-up to elections and referendums, as people register to ensure they can vote. The number can then fall back as Electoral Registration Offices carry out their annual canvass to update the registers. For example, they aim to take account of deaths and changes of address.

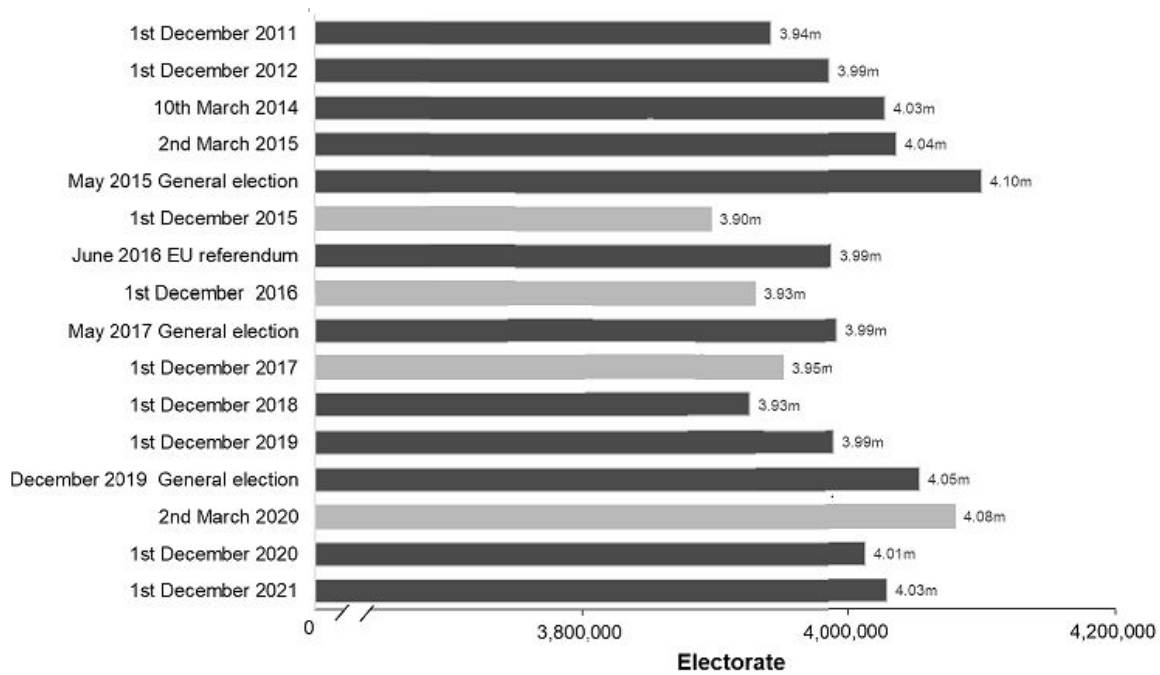
**Figure 1: Scottish electorates, 2011 to 2021**



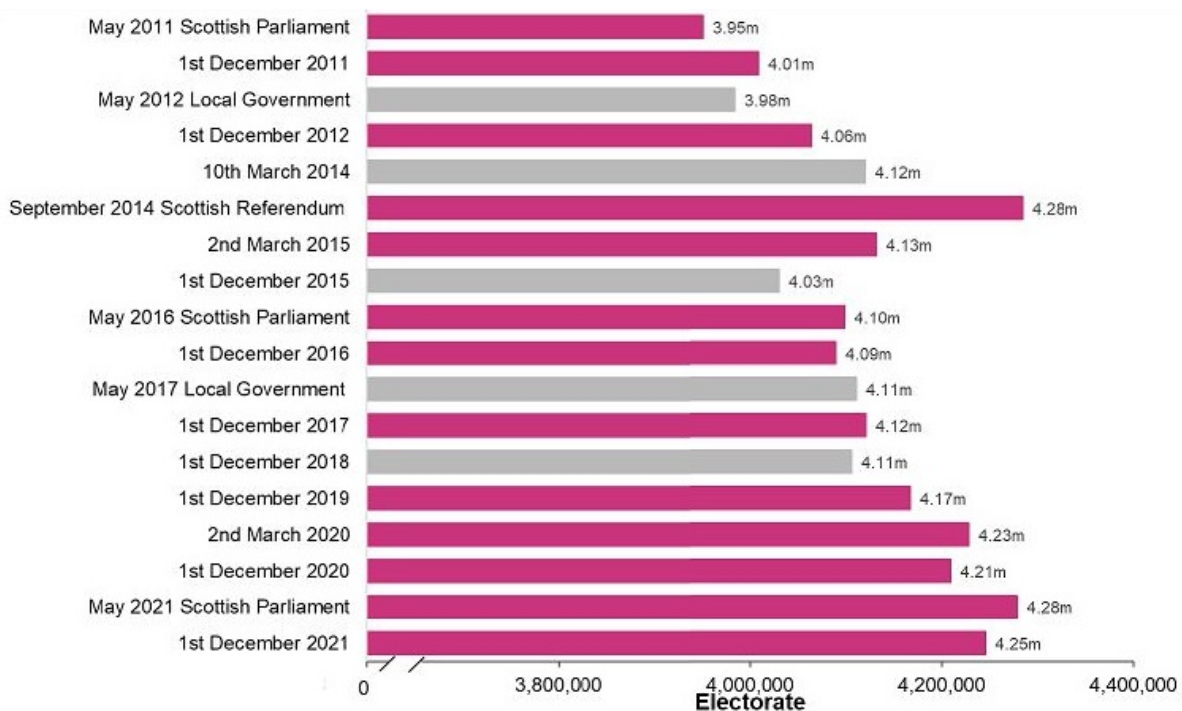
**Note**

From December 2012 to December 2015, the reference point for these statistics was 1 March. All other reference points are 1 December. Two reference points occurred during 2015 and 2020 - March and December for both years. The IER was introduced in September 2014 but the impact would have occurred in September 2015 (start of the new academic year)

**Figure 2: UK Parliament electorate in Scotland, correlated to key votes, 2011 to 2021**



**Figure 3: Scottish Parliament and local government electorate, correlated to key votes, 2010 to 2021**



## 2. UK Parliament electors

The number of registered voters for UK Parliamentary elections in Scotland totalled 4,028,700 at 1 December 2021. This was 16,300 (0.4%) higher than the number at 1 December 2020.

Of the 59 UK parliamentary constituencies in Scotland, 43 recorded an increase in their electorate in the year to December 2021.

The largest percentage increases were in:

- East Lothian (1.9%)
- West Dunbartonshire (1.9%)
- Paisley and Renfrewshire North (1.7%).

The largest percentage decreases were in:

- Glasgow North (2.5%)
- Aberdeen North (2.3%)
- Glasgow East (1.6%).

(The percentage decreases in the other 16 constituencies were all below 1.5%.)

At December 2021, the average number of registered voters per UK parliamentary constituency was 68,300.

The constituencies with the largest electorates were:

- Linlithgow and East Falkirk (87,400)
- Falkirk (84,000)
- Livingston (83,400).

The constituencies with the smallest electorates were:

- Na h-Eileanan an Iar (21,300)
- Orkney and Shetland (34,500).

The smallest electorate in a mainland constituency was in Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (47,300).

## 3. Scottish Parliament and Local Government electors

The total number of registered voters for Scottish Parliament and local government elections in Scotland at 1 December 2021 was 4,245,200. This was an increase of 36,300 (0.9%) compared with 1 December 2020.

Between December 2020 and December 2021, the local government electorate increased in all but five of the 32 council areas. The largest percentage increase was in East Lothian (up by 2.9%). The largest percentage decrease was in Na h-Eileanan Siar (down by 0.9%).

The council areas with the highest number of these electors were:

- Glasgow City (465,200)
- City of Edinburgh (397,700)
- Fife (286,100).

The areas with the lowest numbers were:

- Orkney (17,700)
- Shetland (18,100)
- Na h-Eileanan Siar (21,600).

At December 2021, the average number of registered voters per Scottish Parliamentary constituency was 58,200. The constituency with the most people registered to vote was Linlithgow, with 76,100. The smallest electorate was in Orkney Islands (17,700), with the smallest on the mainland in Argyll and Bute (50,200)<sup>1</sup>.

In the year to December 2021 the number of registered voters increased in 57 of the 73 Scottish Parliamentary constituencies.

The largest percentage increases were in:

- Edinburgh Central (3.7%)
- Edinburgh Eastern (3.3%)
- East Lothian (3.3%)
- Dundee City West (2.4%).

The largest percentage decreases were in:

- Glasgow Kelvin (1.6%)
- Aberdeen Central (1.0%)
- Na H-Eileanan an Iar (0.9%).

#### **4. Local Government electoral wards**

For local government elections, council areas are split into electoral wards. Each ward has either three or four elected councillors. At December 2021, there were some changes to North Ayrshire ward names, area codes and number of councillors. The number of wards decreased from ten to nine. More information on these changes can be found in the [background note](#). [Table 1](#) below show these changes in North Ayrshire. There were also changes to ward names and area codes in the Shetland Islands, see [table 2](#) below.

<sup>1</sup> Although it does have areas that are not on the Scottish mainland, the Argyll and Bute constituency is not protected by the [Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 \(PVSaCA\)](#). As such, Argyll and Bute was held to the same standards as the rest of the mainland when constituency boundaries were re-drawn. More information on the constituencies is included in the [background notes](#).



**Table 1: New ward changes in North Ayrshire**

Number of electoral ward	Name of electoral ward	Number of councillors to be returned
1	North Coast	5
2	Garnock Valley	5
3	Ardrossan	3
4	Arran	1
5	Saltcoats and Stevenston	5
6	Kilwinning	4
7	Irvine West	4
8	Irvine East	3
9	Irvine South	3

**Table 2: New ward changes in Shetland Islands**

Number of electoral ward	Name of electoral ward	Number of councillors to be returned
1	North Isles	3
2	Shetland North	3
3	Shetland West	2
4	Shetland Central	4
5	Lerwick North and Bressay	3
6	Lerwick South	4
7	Shetland South	4

There are a total of 353 electoral wards, with an average of 12,000 registered voters per ward. However, this varied depending on the number of elected members and other local considerations. The ward with the smallest number of elected members (2), and also the lowest registered voters (1,400) was Shetland West in the Shetland Islands.

The 185 three-member wards had 10,100 registered voters on average. This ranged from 1,800 in North Isles (Orkney Islands) up to 19,600 in Corstorphine/ Murrayfield (City of Edinburgh).

The 167 four-member wards had an average of 14,200 registered voters. This ranged from 2,500 in Barraigh, Bhatarsaigh, Eirisgeigh agus Uibhist a Deas (Barra, Vatersay, Eriskay and South Uist)(Na h-Eileanan Siar) up to 28,700 in Liberton/ Gilmerton (City of Edinburgh).

## 5. 16 and 17 year old electors

At December 2021, there were 77,600 registered voters aged 16 or 17. This was an increase of 4,300 (5.9%) compared with December 2020. They accounted for 1.8% of the total electorate. The council area where 16 and 17 year olds made up the highest proportion of the electorate was East Renfrewshire (2.7%). This proportion was lowest in Glasgow City (1.2%).

## 6. Postal voters

It was anticipated that opting to register for a postal vote in the 6 May 2021 elections to the Scottish Parliament may have been more popular in response to the Covid pandemic. At December 2021, 930,200 registered voters for UK Parliamentary elections (23.1% of the total electorate) had opted for a postal vote. This represented an increase of 255,100 (37.8%) compared with December 2020.

At December 2021, a total of 954,500 registered voters for Scottish Parliament and local government elections (22.5% of the total electorate) had opted for a postal vote. This represented an increase of 264,100 (38.3%) compared with December 2020. This means that nearly a quarter of voters in Scotland are now able to cast their ballot earlier than polling day. This compares with an eighth of voters in 2011. With the local government elections taking place on 5 May 2022, it is anticipated that this level will be maintained through to the next electoral register.

Registering for postal voting was generally higher in more rural or remote constituencies, and lower in more urban ones.

## 7. Overseas electors

At December 2021, a total of 6,700 British citizens resident overseas were registered voters for UK Parliamentary elections. This was 0.2% of the total electorate and a decrease of nearly 3,000 (30.5%) compared with December 2020.

The number of such voters tends to be higher in years where there is a referendum or General Election. So for instance it was relatively high in 2016 (15,200), 2017 (12,800) and 2019 (11,600).

## 8. Foreign nationals on the electoral register

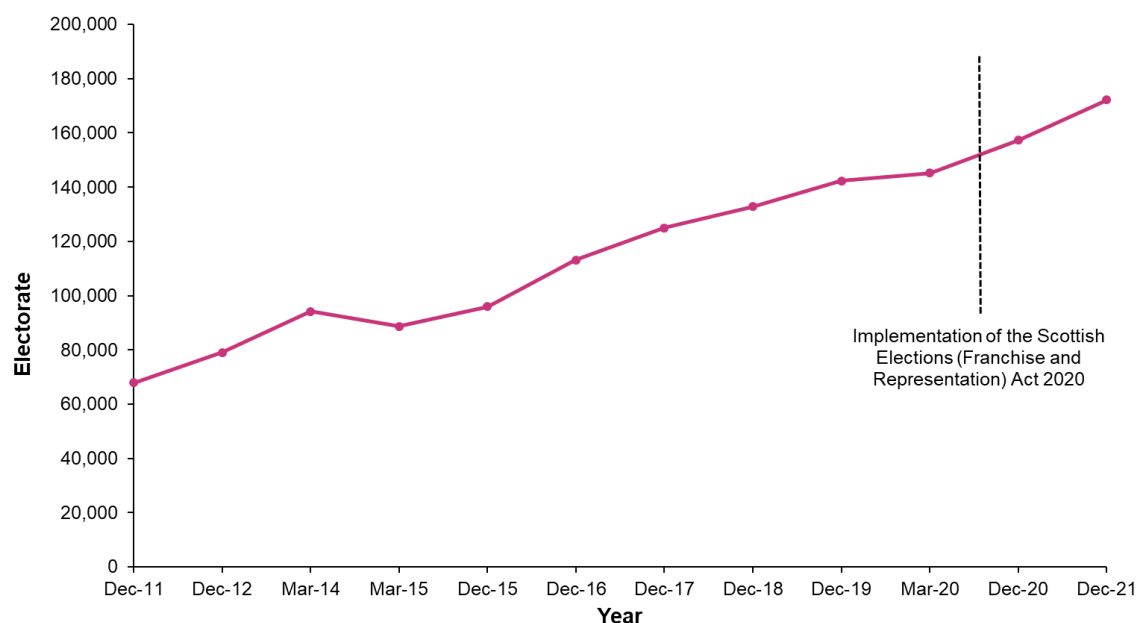
From July 2020, the electoral franchise was extended to all foreign nationals living in Scotland, not just EU and qualifying commonwealth citizens. At December 2021, there were 172,100 foreign nationals<sup>2</sup> registered to vote in Scottish Parliament and local government elections. This represented 4.1% of the total electorate, and is the highest number ever recorded. It is an increase of 14,700 (9.4%) compared with December 2020.

The council areas with the highest proportion of foreign nationals in the electorate at December 2021 were:

- City of Edinburgh (10.4%)
- Aberdeen City (9.9%)
- Glasgow City (6.3%).

<sup>2</sup> Citizens of the Republic of Ireland and qualifying Commonwealth citizens resident in the UK are entitled to vote in all parliamentary and local government elections in the UK, and are not included as 'foreign nationals' in these statistics.

**Figure 4: Number of foreign nationals registered to vote in Scottish Parliament and local government elections, 2011 to 2021**

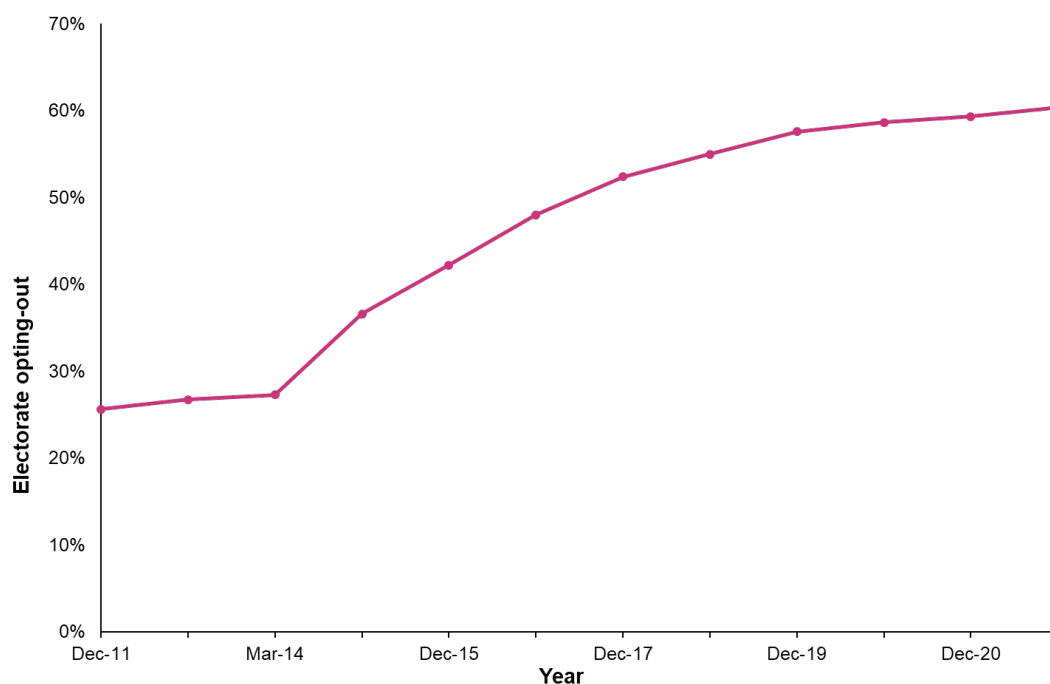


Note: Two reference points occurred during 2015 and 2020 - March and December for both years. Dotted line indicates the extension of the electorate franchise to qualifying residents from all countries following the implementation of the [Scottish Elections \(Franchise and Representation\) Act 2020](#).

## 9. Opted out voters

There are two versions of the electoral register – the full register and the ‘open register’. The full register is used only for elections. It can also be used in certain specified circumstances, for example preventing and detecting crime. The open register is available to anyone who wants to buy a copy, for example marketing companies. Electors can opt out of the open register. In December 2011, around a quarter of registered voters opted out of the open register. Since then it has risen yearly, and by December 2021 had reached a high of 60%.

**Figure 5: Percentage of Scottish Parliament electors opted out of the open register, 2011 to December 2021**



Note: Two reference points occurred during 2015 and 2020 - March and December for both years.

## 10. Service voters

At December 2021, the number of service voters registered to vote in parliamentary and local elections in Scotland was 1,200. This represented 0.03% of the total electorate. This was a decrease of 300 (20.4%) compared with December 2020.

## 11. Anonymous voters

Anonymous registration is available to electors whose safety would be at risk if their name or address were listed on the electoral register. The number of anonymous registered voters in Scotland is small. At December 2021, there were 176 such people on the electoral register for UK Parliamentary elections. The corresponding number on the electoral register for Scottish Parliament and local government elections was 186.

**Table 3: Total number of anonymous voters, 2017 to 2020**

	Dec 2017	Dec 2018	Dec 2019	Mar 2020	Dec 2020	Dec 2021
UK Parliament	116	130	194	215	188	176
Scottish Parliament	127	137	207	223	193	186

## 12. Links to related statistics

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publish electoral statistics for each of the UK countries. These are available in the electoral registration section of the [ONS website](#). The next ONS publication, Electoral Statistics, UK: 2021 is due for publication on 5 April 2022.

## Notes on statistical publications

### National Statistics

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority (UKSA) has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in line with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics (available on the [UKSA](#) website).

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is National Records of Scotland's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

The continued designation of these statistics as National Statistics was confirmed in May 2011.

### Information on background and source data

Further details on data source(s), timeframe of data and timeliness, continuity of data, accuracy, etc can be found in the [About this Publication](#) document that is published alongside this publication on the NRS website.

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